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Viewing cable 06BOGOTA1981, NEW ARMY COMMANDER MAJOR GENERAL MARIO MONTOYA

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Understanding cables

Every cable message consists of three parts:

- The top box shows each cables unique reference number, when and by whom it originally was sent, and what its initial classification was.
- The middle box contains the header information that is associated with the cable. It includes information about the receiver(s) as well as a general subject.
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Discussing cables

If you find meaningful or important information in a cable, please link directly to its unique reference number. Linking to a specific paragraph in the body of a cable is also possible by copying the appropriate link (to be found at the paragraph symbol). Please mark messages for social networking services like Twitter with the hash tags **#cablegate** and a hash containing the reference ID e.g. **#06BOGOTA1981**.

Reference ID	Created	Released	Classification	Origin
06BOGOTA1981	2006-03-06 18:24	2011-08-30 01:44	SECRET	Embassy Bogota

Appears in these articles:

<http://www.elespectador.com/noticia-clave-252925-colombia-wikileaks>

VZCZCXYZ0008
RR RUEHWEB

DE RUEHBO #1981/01 0651824
ZNY SSSSS ZZH
R 061824Z MAR 06
FM AMEMBASSY BOGOTA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 2810
INFO RUEHCV/AMEMBASSY CARACAS 7271
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC

S E C R E T BOGOTA 001981

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/01/2016
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [MOPS](#) [PINR](#) [CO](#)
SUBJECT: NEW ARMY COMMANDER MAJOR GENERAL MARIO MONTOYA
URIBE

Classified By: AMBASSADOR WILLIAM B. WOOD;
REASONS 1.4 (B) and (D)

SUMMARY

¶1. (C) On February 22, Major General Mario Montoya Uribe was sworn in as the Commander of the Colombian Army (COLAR). Montoya had been Commander of the Army First Division and the Caribbean Joint Task Force, one of Colombia's two major commands. Montoya replaced Major General Reinaldo Castellanos, who was fired by President Uribe. Montoya work with President Uribe as Fourth Brigade Commander in Medellin and is said to be close to the President. He is one of the most highly decorated COLAR officers and has experience in the field and with Venezuela. Montoya, at the request of Castellanos, was recently investigated by military intelligence on allegations of corruption and ties to paramilitaries; the allegations remain unsubstantiated. Military sources at post say Montoya is highly-respected, politically astute, and media-savvy. End Summary.

NEW COMMANDER REPORTEDLY A FAVORITE OF URIBE

¶2. (C) On February 22, Montoya became the new Commander of the COLAR following the firing of Major General Castellanos after public revelation of recruit abuse at a training center in Tolima Department (septel). Montoya is reportedly close to President Uribe, whom he met while serving as the Fourth Brigade Commander in Medellin.

EXPERIENCE IN THE FIELD; EXPERIENCE WITH VENEZUELA

¶3. (C) Montoya is one of the most highly decorated COLAR officers and has had a variety of assignments, including commanding officer of a brigade, division, and joint task force unit. Most recently, he was given command of the Joint Caribbean Command in Santa Marta. (This command was to be a model for reorganizing the Colombian military.) Prior to that, he was the Commander of the Army First Division, also in Santa Marta, and Commander of the Fourth Brigade in Medellin.

¶4. (C) As Commander of the Fourth Brigade, Montoya launched a risky urban combat offensive against the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) in the "Comuna 13" area of Medellin in 2002. The offensive, which required fighting uphill and into reinforced trenches, successfully ended FARC control of Comuna 13 and is generally considered a success for Montoya. There have been allegations of excessive civilian casualties in the operation. The FARC, members of which were living openly in Comuna 13 at that time, alleges that the Fourth Brigade launched mortars that injured civilians. According to DAO reporting, shrapnel found in the area was not consistent with munitions used by the COLAR.

¶5. (S) As Commander of the Joint Caribbean Command, and in his previous jobs, Montoya has been on the front line, literally and figuratively, with Venezuela for the last several years. He has shown initiative in dealing with issues along the Venezuelan border. In addition, Montoya has personally dealt with Venezuelan Strategic Operations Commander General Wilfredo Silva.

UNSUBSTANTIATED PARAMILITARY TIES

¶6. (C) In December 2005, the COLAR Counterintelligence Center (CECIM), at the direction of former Commander Castellanos, perhaps for political reasons, initiated investigations into three COLAR generals. One was Montoya, who was investigated for corruption, possible ties to the United Self Defense Forces of Colombia (AUC), and narcotics trafficking, stemming from his time in Antioquia Department and along the north coast. According to DAO reporting, Montoya allegedly was involved in scams with corrupt

Colombian National Police officials who allowed him to take credit for drug seizures and anti-terrorist operations, while protecting the narcotrafficking activities of, and providing weapons to, the AUC. The Embassy is not aware of evidence to corroborate these allegations and does not have access to the results of the CECIM investigation.

PERSONAL INFORMATION AND ASSESSMENT

17. (S) According to military sources at post, Montoya is highly-respected, politically astute, and media-savvy. He was widely viewed as a likely successor to Castellanos. In his first press statements as COLAR Commander, he pledged to "get the army beyond the scandal" and provide security for the upcoming congressional and presidential elections. Montoya was born on April 29, 1948 in Bilga, Valle del Cauca, Colombia. He is married to Colombian Maria Eugenia and has two children. Montoya has 13 siblings; two of his sisters live in Portland, Oregon. Montoya speaks English but prefers his native Spanish.
WOOD